

# STORM WARNINGS

Vol. 5, Issue 2 - June, 2016

The Perfect Storm: Progress not Perfection!



**R. Michael Conley**  
*Founder*

"We are heading into a perfect storm and don't see it coming," according to R. Michael Conley, Founder of Weathering the Storm, LLC and this website.

The WTS mission is to "Awaken, engage and help others to weather the storm."

The WTS website provides the following on a regular basis:

**Storm Warnings:** An in-depth quarterly newsletter.

**News Flash:** Frequent postings on topical perfect storm issues.

**Best Practices:** Featuring leaders in sustainability practices.

## The Perfect Storm: Progress not Perfection!

There's good news and bad news. The bad news; the forces of the *perfect storm* are still roiling and growing. The good news - really good news - is that we are at last awakening to the threat and taking constructive actions that could mitigate the storm's sharper edges. In this issue, our publisher, R. Michael Conley, expresses his grounds for cautious optimism and how it will affect the editorial policies of this publication.

**WTS:** In this our fifth year of publication, we don't recall you ever linking the words "cautious optimism" to the "perfect storm" in any way, shape or form; what's this all about?

**Conley:** That's not totally true, but frankly, I'm starting to see some encouraging signs that I haven't seen before. The most encouraging, by far, is what seems to be a growing awareness that our current pathways are unsustainable. This awakening is a critical first step, and it is starting to generate a spirit of innovation, a willingness to change and constructive action steps on a number of fronts. We want to build on this momentum going forward with a greater emphasis on the positive developments we are seeing.

I don't see this as a change in our mission to "*awaken, engage, and help mankind weather the storm,*" but there will be a subtle shift in emphasis from the "awakening" part to the "engaging" and "helping" parts. One important way to engage others is to highlight effective solutions and provide levers of engagement that they can latch on to. You will see that emphasized more in future postings, but rest assured we will continue to call attention to the threatening perfect storm issues as they emerge.

**WTS:** What signs of awakening or resiliency are you seeing that make you feel more "cautiously optimistic?"

**Conley:** It's really a compilation of emerging trends, new data, and anecdotal stories that are giving me pause to reflect. The Millennials, for instance, are becoming game-changers. As the dominant new generational cohort - surpassing the baby-boomers in numbers - they are challenging assumptions and changing the dialogue. Politicians or policymakers that ignore them do so at their own peril - and with it,

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**WTS Guide:** A free “how-to” Guide for beginners.

**Info & Resources:** Books, articles information & resources:

**[weatheringthestorm.net](http://weatheringthestorm.net)**

**About the Founder:**

Mike Conley is the Founder of Weathering the Storm, LLC and Chairman & CEO of the Conley Family Foundation. As a former Fortune 500 business executive, author, lecturer, and public policy activist, Conley has written and spoken on topics related to the perfect storm. He graduated from the University of Minnesota, after serving in the U.S. Navy, and later completed a post-grad program at Stanford University. He is active on several boards and advisory groups.

the prerequisites for building the political will to change are now emerging.

In that the Gen Xers and Millennials are the ones that will get stuck with the IOUs we’ve left them, we can expect their world views to reflect these concerns. For example, climate change is far more than an abstract concept to them; it’s an existential threat to their future. Run-away government deficits and debts are more than a nerdy set of CBO projections to them; they are threatening roadblocks that will prevent them from receiving the same level of Medicare and Social Security benefits as those preceding them. If you don’t believe me, just ask them.

My point is simple: With their growing numbers and with so much at stake, they will play an increasingly important role in shaping our approach to the perfect storm. They will challenge the vested interests of the status quo, and their agenda and timeframes will transcend current boundaries. Their focus will be on how policy decisions made today will impact their futures; not on how the decision will impact quarterly earnings or political PAC contributions.

For my money, this longer term view is a healthy development (Please see: “Whatever happened to Strategic Thinking?”). Millennials - and a growing number of non-Millennials - get it; they are starting to make waves and change the dialogue of the debate. As such, it’s the right time for this publication to spend less time on

trying to “awaken” people to threats that they are intuitively starting to grasp, and more time on how they can constructively “engage” in solutions that will help them weather the storm.

**WTS:** Can you be more specific about the positive things you are seeing that are making you more “cautiously optimistic” about the future?

**Conley:** I have tremendous faith in our resiliency, innovative capabilities and survival instincts to cope with even the most difficult challenges, but that can never happen until we’ve awakened to the threats we must address. I think that awakening is starting to happen on multiple fronts, and that changes the whole ball game for me.

I’ll frame a few observations within the context of the *4-E Perfect Storm* model I often use to describe the threats we face. The model, if you will recall, sub-divides the gathering storm forces into four

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quadrants that include; 1) energy, 2) environmental and ecological, 3) economics and geopolitical, and 4) expectations and behavioral forces. (Please see: The Perfect Storm). Let me offer a few encouraging signs in each of these areas:

On the energy front, I see real progress being made with respect to the fuel efficiency of our cars and trucks; the growing market share of electric and hybrid-powered cars; blossoming public transportation and rail systems and promising new alternative fuel systems. To be sure, our oil situation will be problematic in the future, but we are making good headway on other energy fronts. (Please see: “Oil: A New Ticking Time Bomb.”)

Renewable energy systems are on the cusp of approaching a price parity with other fuels. Coal is being replaced by cleaner baseload fuels - natural gas and renewables - for electrical production. Nuclear energy is making a comeback and even garnering support from environmental groups concerned with the carbon footprint of coal-fired plants.

On the environmental front, the Paris Accords and domestic policies geared toward providing cleaner energy with lower carbon emissions are gaining traction daily. The state of Minnesota is one of the true leaders in this area thanks to the work of such great state-based organizations as Fresh Energy, the Great Plains Institute, Climate Generation: A Will Steger Legacy, EnerChange and the University of Minnesota’s Institute on the Environment, to name a few.

In conjunction with their efforts, the Millennials and others are having a tremendous impact on the climate change debate. Their influence will grow as savvy marketers and retailers appreciate the need to offer them cleaner, safer and more environmentally-friendly products and services. We’re also blessed with a progressive corporate community in Minnesota that gets it; many, in fact are movers and shakers in the clean energy movement and role models for business communities in other states.

**WTS:** From an economic and geopolitical perspective, are you as cautiously optimistic as you are on the energy and environmental fronts?

**Conley:** The short answer is no. Our government deficits and debts continue to climb and it poses a clear and present danger to future generations. I’ve noticed, however, a growing concern within the political debates about the frightful intergenerational impacts that deficit spending will have on future generations. Though we’re a long way from addressing our budgetary challenges, this at least is a start. (Please see: Bubbles and Backlashes”)

Younger voters have turned out in droves in this year’s primary elections, and we can expect their voting power to increase enormously in the future. Looking ahead, it will be increasingly difficult for politicians to kick the can down the road on tough votes by passing off the costs or consequences of their inactions to future generations; Millennials will see to that.

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With respect to the geopolitical world, the one bright spot is the almost universal acceptance that climate change is happening and that we need to collectively do something about it while we still can. Global warming, fresh water shortages, rising sea levels, record droughts, fires and floods, to name a few, are tragedies we can no longer ignore or dismiss as a quirk within a computer model. They are happening now and reinforcing the need for collective actions. This, I submit, is a far, far cry from the abyss of denial that existed only a few short years ago.

**WTS:** That brings up the last factor in your perfect storm model; “Expectations and behaviors.” What, if any, positives do you see in this area?

**Conley:** This is where it all starts. As I’ve mentioned, the Millennials, Gen Xers and others have serious doubts about their future access to the *American Dream*, and they’ll want to do something about it. Their voting power and economic clout will grow, and they will inevitably organize into an AARP-type organization that will represent their intergenerational concerns. As they do, and as their expectations and attitudes change along with their behaviors, we will see an enormous shift in the manner in which we approach the challenges of the perfect storm. I see this as a real positive.

**WTS:** Given the “glimmers” of optimism you have just provided, do you think the threat of a perfect storm has subsided?

**Conley:** Absolutely not. We will not escape the perfect storm in our pathway, but I do have a better feeling about our ability to mitigate many of its sharper edges. Why? Because we seem to be taking the one step we had to take before we could do anything about our problem; we had to awaken to and admit that we have a problem. And as we do so, we will realize that denial is not a strategy.

Believe me, we have no intention of sugar coating the growing threats of the perfect storm, but we will be more emphatic about sharing the positive things we can do to address them.

**WTS:** Will this change the mission, content and scope of the *Weathering the Storm* publication in any way?

**Conley:** Our mission has not changed, but we will put more emphasis on engagement and solutions. We announced some of the changes we will make in our recent *News Flash* article ([Please see: “We’re Pleased to Announce”](#)), but let me provide additional background information on the three major changes we are making:

- 1) The “*Storm Warnings*” and “*News Flash*” articles will continue to be published on a regular basis but with a heavier emphasis on solutions.
- 2) The “*Best Practices*” postings will be ramped up in frequency and scope and fully written and managed by the newest addition to our team, Matt Hoiland. Look for Matt’s first posting in early July. In addition,

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Matt will oversee all Facebook and social media efforts.

3) Last, we are adding a new posting entitled “*News Flash-Backs.*” This posting will provide foundational information with respect to the development of the perfect storm. The intent is to provide our subscribers with additional background information and a better framework for connecting the dots. It will contain the latest research information generated from the book I am now writing.

**WTS:** Before we let you go, can you say a little more about your book and why you are writing it - and also when it will be published?

**Conley:** After publishing my book, *Lethal Trajectories*, I gave a number of talks and speeches on topics pertaining to the perfect storm. I also taught a course for three years through the University of Minnesota’s OLLI program called the “Perfect Storm.” Over the course of many presentations to diverse audiences, I picked up some common threads of concern. The four most commonly expressed questions were:

- How did we ever get into the precarious position now posed by the perfect storm?
- What will our future look like if the current perfect storm trajectories remain the same?
- How will it impact us, our kids, and grand-kids?
- What, if anything, can we do about it?

I thought a lot about these questions and wrote a number of articles on them through my Weathering the Storm website, but I never wrote about it in its entirety. I decided to write a non-fiction book that would lay it all out, chapter and verse, and address all of these questions and more. And, since this story has so many monstrous intergenerational implications, I have titled the book, “*Mortgaging the American Dream; What were we thinking?*”

I learned long ago not to lock myself into a specific completion date. Writing and publishing a book is a laborious process loaded with booby traps. I have found, for instance, that my research is taking me into new avenues of exploration I had never imagined and this takes time. In the meantime, I’ll be periodically sharing snippets from the book through our “*News Flash-Back*” postings.

For more information on what we do, please visit our website at:

[www.WeatheringtheStorm.net](http://www.WeatheringtheStorm.net)